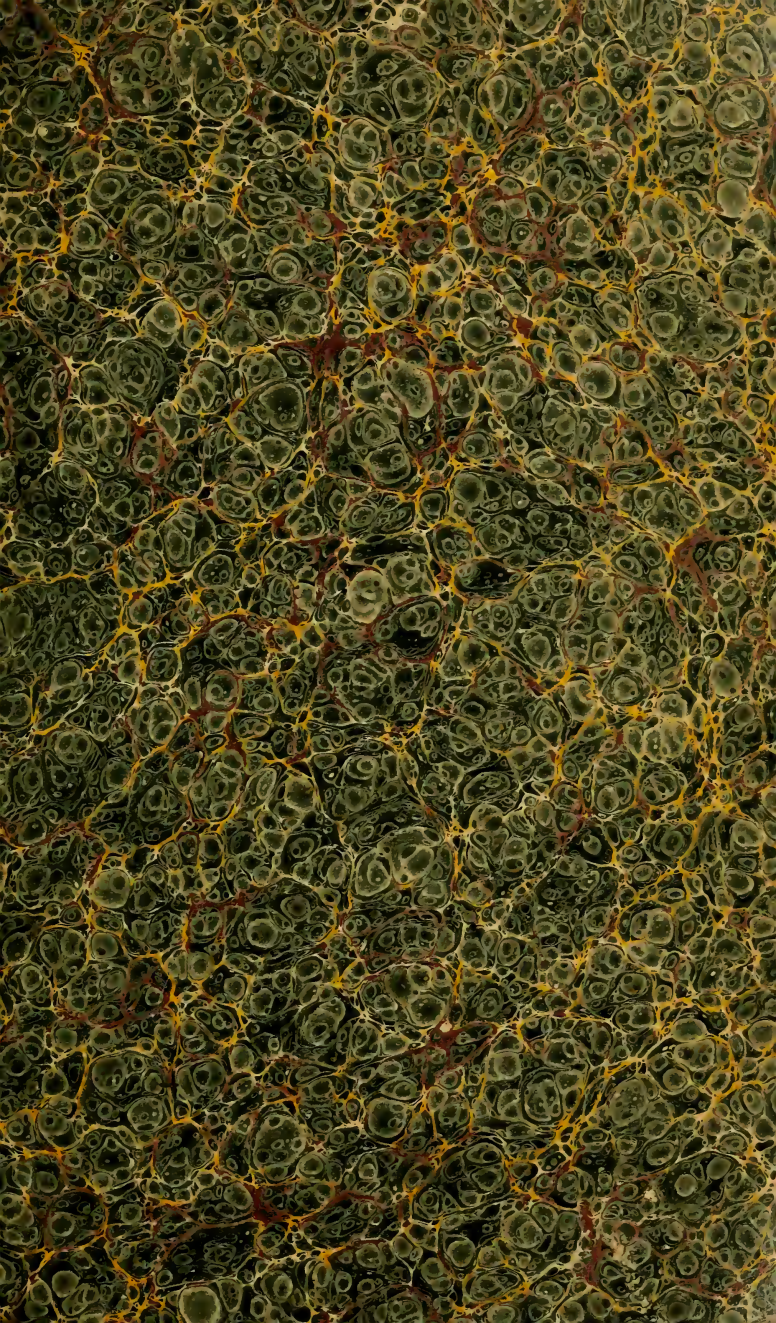


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A N S W E R

To that Important

Q U E S T I O N,

*Whether it is lawful for the Profes-
sors of the Christian Religion
to go to Plays?*

With some SOLILOQUIES annexed.



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A N

A N S W E R

To that Important

Q U E S T I O N,

*Whether it is lawful for the Professors of the
Christian Religion to go to Plays ?*

 Y going to Plays, I mean going to those Assemblies, where Tragedies, Comedies, and such Diversions, are performed.

That going to such Assemblies is unlawful, will appear on a serious Consideration of the following Particulars, *viz.*

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I. That the Design of the Managers, and Actors, or Performers in these Assemblies, is to excite, and increase in all, who go to them, a Love, and a Fondness for the sensual Pleasures they exhibit.

They use their utmost Art, and greatest Industry, to please the Ears, and delight the Eyes, and divert the Mind of every one present, thereby to engage their repeated Attendance: And therefore, since such is their Design, it appears sinful for Christians to encourage them in it, or any Way to contribute to their Support; as every one does who goes to a Play.

It appears sinful, because the holy God requires us to be heavenly minded, to seek those Things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right Hand of God, and to set our Affections on Things above, not on Things on the Earth. *Col. iii. 1, 2.*

And declares, that to be carnally minded is Death, but to be spiritually minded is Life and Peace. *Rom. viii. 6.*

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The Word of the Lord says, “ Love not
 “ the World, neither the Things that are
 “ in the World. If any Man love the
 “ World, the Love of the Father is not
 “ in him ; for all that is in the World, the
 “ Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes,
 “ and the Pride of Life, is not of the Fa-
 “ ther. 1 *John* ii. 15, 16.”

The Design of God by his Gospel is to excite, and cherish, and increase in us a sincere Love to our Creator and Redeemer, to engage our Affections to Objects the most excellent, and to promote our Piety and Virtue.

But the Design of Plays is inconsistent with this: Those long Diversions plainly tend to render the Minds of People carnal and sensual, and to make them negligent of the Things necessary to their eternal Salvation. Hence it appears to be very sinful for any Persons to go to such Assemblies.

The Inconsistency of their Design with the Will of God should convince us, that

he looks on them with Abhorrence, and therefore that we ought to detest them, and never, never to be present at them.

II. It should be considered, that Attendance on those Assemblies is inconsistent with the serious and seasonable Performances of the important Duties of family and secret Worship of the great God; and therefore unlawful or sinful.

If the Masters and Mistresses of Families go to them, the many Hours they have spent in serving divers Lusts and Pleasures, and their late, their very late Return to their Houses and their Suppers, unavoidably occasion either a total Neglect, or an unseasonable and irreverent Performance of family and secret Worship.

And if any Member, or Guest, in a well-regulated Family, goes to a Play, he becomes absent from family Worship, and sets a bad Example, which shews the Unlawfulness of the Liberty he takes.

And, indeed, every one, who goes to these Assemblies, unfits himself for appearing

ing before God in the solemn Services of divine Worship.

Immediately from a Glut of sensual Pleasures, the Soul cannot be in a suitable Frame for Acts of Devotion and Converse with the holy God.

It appears evident from these Considerations, that it is sinful for any Persons to go to a Play.

We should dislike and abhor such Entertainments, and always shun them, on the Account of their being inconsistent with Duties, even with the important Duties of Religion; and not only with the Duties specified, but with all serious Contemplation, and contrary to God's Design of our Sanctification.

III. It must likewise be considered, that these Assemblies are Places of manifold great Temptations, and attended by many of the most vicious Persons of both Sexes.

They are Places, where People are in Danger of falling into Acquaintance with
Persons

Persons of corrupt Principles, or immoral Practices, and of meeting with Temptations, by which many have been overcome and been ruined for ever.

And, on these Accounts, we ought never to go to any of them, that we may avoid the Danger, and the Temptation, and Snares, we shall be exposed to in such Assemblies.

Watch and pray that ye enter not into Temptation, said the great Redeemer; but we shall break this Commandment, and sin against our God and Saviour, if we neglect Prayer, and needlessly and wilfully run into Assemblies abounding with Snares and Temptations to Sin.

O my Soul! labour to be able to say, I have not sat with vain Persons, neither will I go in with Dissemblers. I have hated the Congregation of evil Doers, and will not sit with the Wicked. *Psalms xxvi. 4.*

SOLILOQUY I.

*Containing some general Inferences
from the Answer.*

WHEN any Person is naturally inclined or persuaded by some Acquaintance to go with them to Assemblies, where Plays and such-like Diversions are performed, has he not Ground to think and reason thus with himself? *viz.*

Is it really the Design of the Managers and Actors in these Assemblies, to excite and cherish in People a Love of sensual Pleasures? And are these Entertainments prevalent to this End?

Then surely I ought never to enter into any of them; because the more my Affections are engaged to them, the more they will be drawn off from my God and Saviour, and from those better, those far more excellent Objects, those spiritual and everlasting Blessings purchased by Christ, revealed

vealed and promised in the Gospel to all who love God, and believe in his Son Jesus Christ.

And should I not likewise abstain from them on the Account, that the more Time I spend in sensual Enjoyments, so much less Time I have to seek Peace and Reconciliation with the righteous God, to whom I have been an Enemy by many wicked Works ?

Is the Design and Tendency of these Entertainments inconsistent with the Design of the merciful God, in sending his one only begotten and well-beloved Son into the World ?

And are they contrary to the End of his blessing the World with the sacred Scriptures, and with the Gospel of Salvation ? Then it is evident that I ought not to go unto any of them, or do any Thing that signifies an Approbation of them ; but on all Occasions express a Dislike of them. Remember, O my Soul ! that the Grace of God, which bringeth Salvation, teacheth us, that denying Ungodliness and worldly

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ly Lust, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present World.

And consider also the Snares and Temptations, which abound in such Assemblies, to many foolish and hurtful Lusts, which war against the Soul ; and should not these make me tremble at the Thoughts of going to them ?

Was I assured, that in such a Company of People, some had the Infection of the Plague, would I not keep at due Distance from it, though I knew not who were the Persons that had the mortal Infection ?

And why should I refuse going into such a Company, but from a natural Love to, and a necessary Care of, the Health and Life of my Body ? and should I not be as careful for the Health, the Life, and Salvation of my Soul ? And avoid those Assemblies, where many meet with that Infection of Sin, which has brought them to Ruin eternal ?

Am I importuned by some Acquaintance to

go to a Play ? and should I venture to provoke the Anger of the Almighty God, by complying with the Temptation, and transgress his Will, rather than to reject their Request, and deny myself the sensual Gratifications I am inticed to ?

Should I not rather try to convince my Companions of the Sinfulness of going to such Assemblies ; and shew them, that the Time spent at such Entertainments ; may be much better employed, employed in a Manner more pleasing to the all-seeing God, and more to the Advantage and Comfort of their own immortal Spirits ?

Think, O my Soul ! that thy Time may be spent in useful Endeavours for the Good of thyself, and others, without neglecting, or carelessly performing the Duties of religious Worship. True, there are various Pleasures crouded together in those Assemblies ; but they are carnal, they are sensual, and they pollute the Mind.

There is a far more rational and untainted Delight to be found in the Exercise of Piety ; and doubtless that Person is unacquainted

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ed with God, and never had any holy Fellowship or Communion with him, but remains a Stranger to him, and dead in Sin, who has not found greater Delight in the Worship of God, than ever he experienced in the Pleasures of Sin.

When People, who have indulged and enjoyed all Sorts of sensual Gratifications, become converted, and are brought to a real Acquaintance with God, they loath their former sensual Diversions.

But, O my Soul! there are other sad Consequences of going to Plays, which deserve thy Notice.

If in my Youth I go to them, and should live to be married and have Children, my doing so is a bad Example to them, and cuts the Sinews of the Arguments, by which I would persuade them not to take such a Liberty.

Will not such a Son be apt to say, at least in his own Mind, " Father, did you not go to a Play, when you was young? and why

may not I do so too? If it was lawful for you, it is lawful for me."

Thus the Temptations of the Devil are strengthened, and good Advice frustrated.

And thus if a young Man (intended to be a Minister of Christ and his Gospel) goes to Plays, he enervates the Reason and Instructions he may give his Hearers for avoiding those sensual Diversions, which may hinder their Piety and Virtue; the Hearers may reply, at least among themselves, thus, *viz.*

" This Preacher, when he was young,
 " did not scruple going to such Assemblies
 " himself; but now he has taken on him the
 " Character of a Minister of the Gospel,
 " he would teach us to shun those Diversions
 " which he allowed himself to attend."

Oh, how manifold are the ill Consequences of Persons allowing themselves a Liberty, which is contrary to the Will of God! O my Soul! never, never dare to do what thou wilt certainly have Cause to repent

pent of; and what may have a sad Influence on the Minds of others.

O most holy and merciful God, watch over me continually, and restrain me always from going to Assemblies, which are thy Abhorrence, and which ought to be mine! For Jesus Christ his sake, grant me these Petitions. *Amen.*



SOLILOQUY II.

Proper for Persons, who having allowed themselves the Liberty of going to Plays, &c. do now rightly consider Things to their own Conviction, and disliking of their former Course of Life.

IS it not reasonable, is it not a Matter of great Importance for me to consider, for what Purposes the all-wise God has formed me,

me, and bestowed on me those Faculties and Powers I enjoy?

I observe that my Body is curiously made, and with various *Senses*, common indeed to Animals of lower Ranks; and that, although for muscular Strength the Bodies of Men are inferior to many brute Creatures, and inferior to some of them in the Acuteness of their Senses; yet, that they are superior to all of them, as to a Capacity for various Kinds of bodily Actions, such as are performed by Seamen in their Navigation, by Soldiers in their martial Exercises, and by the numberless Sorts of Mechanics in the Exercise of their different Arts.

And by Reflection on myself, I find there is something in my Body different from it, and different from all meer material Substances.

Something which thinks, reasons, and forms Schemes of Conduct, of different Kinds. Something capable of pursuing and attaining various Sorts and Degrees of Knowledge, and of prosecuting a Variety of different Ends and Projects; all which
are

are impossible to be done by any Being that consists only of a material Substance, however the Particles, which compose it, may be figured and connected.

This immaterial, this essential and most excellent Part of Man was doubtless put into the Body for Ends more sublime than to direct the Actions of it, in seeking after Riches and Honours in this World, and the Things which only give a Pleasure to the Senses of it.

I ought to conclude, that as the great God put a Spirit into Man capable of seeking after and obtaining the Knowledge of himself, and of his Laws; so it is his only Interest to know God, and what he requires of him.

And surely it concerns me to examine my past Course of Life, whether I have been thoughtful of, and duly intent on, the chief End for which I was made, and am preserved; whether my Soul has employed my Body in a Manner subservient to it; or whether, instead of this, I have not employed my Soul as a *Slave* to my Body, in
seeking

seeking after those Things which only relate to it.

I have been very industrious in pursuing after the Things of this World, very diligent in making Provision for the Flesh to fulfil the Lusts of it; but I have been hitherto very thoughtless of the Concerns of my immortal Soul.

Surely it is now high Time to consider the Difference between the Body and the Soul of Man, in respect of their *Duration*, and their different Natures.

As to Duration, the Body cannot continue long in Life. No, but only for a few Years, and very few in Comparison of many Ages; and are as nothing in Comparison with the eternal Duration of the Soul after the Death of the Body.

And as to the Natures of these two essential Parts of a Man, surely the Safety, the Welfare and Happiness of the Soul, which will always exist, is of far greater Moment than the Welfare of the Body, through the short Time of its Continuance in this Life.

But

But I should consider, that the Happiness of the Body, while it lives here, and after its Resurrection at the End of the World, depends on the Happiness of the Soul, as to its State and Condition before Death.

And therefore that my chief Concern is to secure a Felicity for my Soul, which will endure through the present Life; and for ever after the Body is dead.

And for this Purpose it is necessary for me to examine, whether I have acquainted myself with the Almighty, and with the Revelation which in his sacred Scripture he has made of himself, and of my Duty, and of the Way of Salvation; and whether my Life and Actions have been what they ought to have been.

On a little serious Reflection my Conscience charges me with having been guilty of numberless Sins against the Lord my Maker.

And will he not call me to an Account for them? Has he not appointed unto all Men once to die? and that after Death they shall

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be

be brought to Judgment? and that then they must receive a Recompence according to their Works and Doings in this World?

O my Soul! employ thy Thoughts now on the solemn Appearance thou must make before the holy and all-seeing God, the Witness of all thy secret Cogitations, of all thy Words, and of all thy Actions: Thou wilt never be able to avoid appearing before Him, who is Judge of all, and who will bring every Work into Judgment, with every secret Thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. *Eccl. xii. 14.*

O reflect on thy past Life! how regardless thou hast been of thy everlasting Concerns, and thoughtless of what will be thy Condition, when thou shalt be removed hence into the World of Spirits! Think how utterly negligent thou hast been of seeking the Forgiveness of thy Sins, and Peace and Reconciliation with the righteous God, and the great Salvation offered in the Gospel, and how thou hast employed all thy Time in seeking after earthly Things.

Alas! how many Hours have I wasted
in

in Attendance on Plays, or in other Assemblies for sensual Gratifications, or in reading Plays and Novels, or at Clubs in a vain and trifling, or a corrupting Conversation! and have robbed God of the Homage, the Honour and Worship due unto him; and have not employed one Hour in a Day, or a Week, or Month, or Year, in a serious reading his holy Word, or some other religious Exercises; and have had no Desire, no Care to worship God in secret, or in the Family, or in public with the Assemblies of his People on his holy Sabbaths!

Alas! I cannot reflect on these Things without Shame, and Horror, and Self-Condernnation.

How dreadful will be my Account, if God, so greatly provoked, should the ensuing Night require my Soul of me, and bring it to his Barr, to answer for my Neglects of Duty, and my Transgressions of his holy Commandments!

In this Case, what remains to me but a fearful looking for of Judgments, and of hearing a tremendous Sentence of Condemn-

ation; even that Sentence, Go, thou cursed ;
depart from me, thou Worker of Iniquity ?

My poor Soul, my wretched Soul ! am
I in Danger of hearing such an amazing,
such a confounding and an irreversibile Sen-
tence pass upon me ? And is it not Time to
consider my State and Condition ?

While there is Life, and the Means of
Grace are continued, there may be Hope.

Surely it is Time for me to enquire, whe-
ther there is not a Way, in which so great a
Sinner as I have been, may obtain Mercy
of God, and Peace and Reconciliation with
him, and the Pardon of my Sins. It is
Time for me to ask, What must I do to be
saved ?

If I die without Faith and Repentance,
and before I have obtained an Interest in the
one only Saviour, I shall be damned for
ever, and sent to a Place of endless Tor-
ments, among Devils, whom God hath
reserved in everlasting Chains under Dark-
ness, unto the Judgment of the great Day.
Jude vi. A tremendous Judgment! awful

to think upon. O what serious Influence should it have on my Mind continually!

And what is it that I have been selling my Soul for ; and losing the Love and Favour of God, and an Interest in the one only Redeemer ; and losing that great Salvation which I want, and which he purchased for all that truly believe in his Name ?

For what, O my Soul ! have I rejected the free Pardon of all Sins offered by the merciful God in his Gospel, and turned away from his gracious Presence, and the Communion of Saints ; for what is it that I have acted thus, but for the Pleasures of Sense, the Pleasures of Sin ; Things which only gratify one or other of my bodily Senses and Appetites ?

Things which have no Tendency, no Capacity of yielding any rational Satisfaction to the immortal Spirit, which dwelleth in my Body.

I perceive now, that I am in a most miserable Condition: My Sins are numberless,

less, my Guilt inexpressible: I have been, through all my past Life, an Enemy to God, by my wicked Works; and therefore the holy and mighty God may justly deal with me as such a one.

I want a Saviour, I need an Interest in one, who is able to reconcile the provoked God to me; one to satisfy his Justice for my numberless Provocations, and procure a full Pardon for me.

I have wounded my Conscience, I have provoked the holy God to destroy me for ever. Alas! I need, Peace with God, and Peace in my own Conscience.

But no Titles of Honour, no large Estates, no Heaps of Riches, will, or can avail any Thing to procure these Blessings for me, or a Title to Happiness in the Enjoyment of my glorious Creator.

Poor, miserable Creature! how wretchedly have I been mistaken in pursuing after Pleasures? There are indeed Pleasures truly desirable; there are Delights rational, pure, and unmixed, without any bitter Alloy; but these I never sought after.

There

There is a Peace with God which passeth all Understanding or Comprehension ; but I was ignorant of it, at least I never desired, or sought after it.

The keeping his Commandments affords most sincere and solid Satisfaction, but I never obeyed them.

I am assured, that his Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and that all his Paths are Paths of Peace, *Prov.* iii. 12. But I never tried them, I never had any Experience or Taste of them, but been ignorant of God, and of his Holiness, and of the Way of Salvation.

Thoughtless of the Immortality of my Soul, and regardless of its Happiness, both in this World and the next.

Alas! what will become of me, if I shall die in my present Condition ?

God be merciful to me a most foolish and wretched Sinner, and spare me, and make me to become wise unto Salvation! Lord, help me ever more to abstain from all Assemblies for sensual Diversions, and to with-
stand

stand and overcome all Temptations to them! And, with thy Assistance, I will read thy holy Word, and go to those religious Assemblies that meet to worship and to enjoy thee. I will go to them to hear the Gospel preached, which shews the right and effectual Way to be saved.

O rescue me, most gracious God! from all the Snares of the Devil, and work that blessed Change in me, which will render me like unto thee, and fit for holy Fellowship with thee here, and for dwelling with thee for ever, when thy Providence shall take me out of this vain World, and my Soul shall bless and praise thee for ever and ever. *Amen.*



SOLILOQUY III.

Proper for Persons, whose Conviction of their Misconduct in Times past is followed with a thorough Reformation, and a true Conversion to God.

HAPPY for me, that I have at last been inclined to consider the Evil, the Danger, and the miserable Consequences of allowing myself in any Pleasures which are offensive to God, and would hinder a due Attention to my everlasting Concerns.

I am now fully convinced of the Folly of my past Conduct in going to Plays, and other long publick Diversions.

And since my Conviction, I have avoided them, and spent Time in examining the State of my Soul, in reading the sacred Scrip-

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tures;

tures; I have improved Opportunities of hearing the Gospel preached.

O my Soul! hast thou not discovered in thyself a sinful Depravity, and hast thou not been guilty of numberless Sins? Is not the Condition of all Men deplorable till divine Grace makes an Alteration? Are they not, according to the Description of the Apostle, (*Eph. 2.*) dead in Trespasses and Sins; and by Nature Children of Disobedience, and Children of Wrath, walking according to the Course of this World, having their Conversation in the Lusts of the Flesh, fulfilling the Desires of the Flesh, and of the Mind?

And when I thought on this State of Things; did I not become sensible that a great and an holy Change must of Necessity pass on me, in order to my being like to God, and one of his peculiar People, zealous of good Works? and was I not convinced, that except a Man be born again, born of the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven?

Then were the Eyes of my Soul opened, then did I see the Sinfulness and the Misery
of

of my natural State. And, O with what Anguish did the sad Prospect fill my Mind!

Then I had no Peace, no Rest, but great Disquietudes: Then did my Spirit within me cry out, O what shall I do to be saved!

But reading in *Acts* xvi. 31. the Case of the Jailer, and the Answer which the Apostle gave to him on putting the same Question, *viz.* Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. I thought this a plain and a comfortable Answer to my Question; and the Thought rejoiced my trembling Heart. Why may I not then hope for Salvation on believing on the same Lord Jesus, as well as the Jailer?

But what is believing in him? Is it not a believing that he is the MESSIAH, whom God had promised to send into the World to save Sinners? and a believing that he is both willing and able to save even the chiefest of them? Is it not the Sinner's desiring to have the crucified and risen JESUS to save him from all his Sins, from the Dominion, and Influence of indwelling sinful Corruption, and from the Wrath of God, and the deserved

Punishments; and a trusting in him alone for Salvation?

Is this believing in the Lord Jesus Christ? Then I may conclude, that I do believe in his Name.

My Soul consents, and earnestly desires to be one of his true and faithful Disciples; and all my Dependance is on him.

I have no Trust in any religious Duties, or good Works, I may be enabled to perform. I see my best Services are stained with a sinful Mixture. Sad indeed to think upon! But I know that Christ is the End of the Law for Righteousness to every one that believeth. *Rom. x. 4.*

And I rely on his Righteousness for Acceptance with God.

I read, that to him give all the Prophets witness, that through his Name, whosoever believeth on him shall receive Remission of Sins, (*Acts x. 43.*) And that God so loved the World, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth

lieveth on him should not perish, but have everlasting Life, (*John* iii. 16.) And I read, that to as many as have received him (the Lord Jesus) to them gave he Power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe in his Name.

And now, my Soul, who hast had large Experience of the Pleasures of Sin, and an abundant Enjoyment of sensual Gratifications, is there not a more excellent Delight in the Contemplation of these Truths, than ever you tasted before?

Since thou hast been employed in reading the holy Scriptures, the Doctrines, and the Precepts, and Promises of them, and since thou practised religious Duties, hast thou not found greater Satisfaction than ever you knew before?

These are rational Pleasures; but those Enjoyments, which gratify the Senses and Appetites of the Body, cannot deserve that Character.

Since I have been acquainted with the good
Ways

Ways of the Lord, I have found them
 Ways of Pleasantness, and Paths of Peace;
 and the more diligently I persevere in them,
 and the more frequently I converse with my
 God and Saviour, the more am I pleased,
 and the more do my Comforts abound.

If the Lovers of sensual Pleasure did but
 know and experience, as I have done, the
 true Pleasures of a serious holy Life, they
 would despise and forsake those Vanities,
 which now engross their Affections.

O my gracious God, do thou establish
 my Heart in thy good Ways, and grant that
 I may never depart from them! And I
 beseech thee to be merciful to those who have
 been my Companions in Sin and Vanity!
 Do thou awaken their Consciences, and con-
 vert them from the Errors of their Courses!
 And do thou by thy Holy Spirit turn the
 Hearts of them, who are running with the
 Multitude in the broad Way of Sin, which
 leadeth to Destruction. O bring them to
 the Obedience of Faith!

Thus lessen the Number of the Devil's
 Slaves, and increase the Number of the true
 Disciples

Disciples of the holy Jesus ! Thus display
the Energy of thy blessed Spirit, the Efficacy,
the Freeness, and the Sovereignty
of thy Grace ! Thus glorify thyself. *Amen*,
for Jesus Christ his Sake.

These Papers may fitly be concluded with
a few Lines from a late pious Poet, which
are expressive of the Sentiments of every
true Christian.

I send the Joys of Earth away ;
Away, ye Tempters of the Mind,
False as the smooth deceitful Sea,
And empty as the whistling Wind.

Your Streams were floating me along
Down to the Gulph of black Despair ;
And whilst I listen'd to your Song,
Your Streams had e'en convey'd me there.

Lord, I adore thy matchless Grace,
That warn'd me of that dark Abyss,
That drew me from those treacherous Seas,
And bid me seek superior Bliss.

Watts, B. II. H. 11.

When

When in the Light of Faith divine
 We look on Things below,
 Honour, and Gold, and sensual Joys,
 How vain and dang'rous too!

The Pleasures that allure our Sense,
 Are dang'rous Snares to Souls;
 There's but a Drop of flatt'ring Sweet,
 And dash'd with bitter Bowls.

God is my all-sufficient Good,
 My Portion, and my Choice :
 In him my vast Desires are fill'd,
 And all my Powers rejoice.

In vain the World accosts my Ear,
 And tempts my Heart a-new ;
 I cannot buy your Bliss so dear,
 Nor part with Heav'n for you.

Ibid. H. 101.

F I N I S.

